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MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES

December 7, 1984

FROM: POL - John P. Leonard

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On December 3 I met at the Embassy with Mr. Robert Posner, a New York lawyer visiting Paraguay to do research for a book on Josef Mengele. Posner had just come from a lunch with Col. Alejandro Von Eckstein, the Russian emigre who has lived in Paraguay for 50 years and who describes himself as being in charge of intelligence matters for President Stroessner. Posner said that in the course of several conversations with Von Eckstein over the past 2 days he had gained the old man's confidence. Von Eckstein said he was willing to tell Posner what he knew about Mengele, and had arranged for the two of them to travel to Encarnacion to talk to people in that area who have knowledge of the Nazi war criminal. He also said he would arrange for Posner to meet with President Stroessner to talk about Mengele.

Posner said that he was still cultivating Von Eckstein, and that he had not yet begun to question him systematically about Mengele. Nonetheless, the old man had already let drop a lot of information about the Nazi doctor in the course of his rambling discourses. According to Von Eckstein, Mengele first began coming to Paraguay in 1954 or '55, when he was still living in Buenos Aires. Both then and later, Mengele would stay with a man named Werner Jung when visiting Asunción. Jung was, according to Posner, the local representative of the Mengele firm in Germany which manufactures farm equipment.

Von Eckstein said that he was introduced to Mengele by Colonel Hans Rudel, the famous German pilot from the Second World War. Other persons close to Mengele during his years in Paraguay were Alban Krugg, at whose heavily fortified farmhouse near Encarnacion Mengele often stayed, and Otto Biss, a Hungarian Nazi. In addition, Mengele would sometimes stay at the Hotel Tirol outside of Encarnacion.

Von Eckstein confirmed that he had vouched for Mengele when the latter applied for and received Paraguayan citizenship in 1959. He said that, since he knew Mengele had been coming to Paraguay regularly since 1954 or '55, he didn't feel that he was stretching the truth when he supported the latter's claim of having resided here for 5 years, in order to gain his citizenship. Von Eckstein confirmed the assertions of the man who acted as Mengele's lawyer in the naturalization case, Cesar Augusto Sanabria, to the effect that he had no relationship with Mengele beyond having prepared the documents for him for his naturalization.

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According to Von Eckstein, Mengele remained in Paraguay until 1965. After that, he would visit Paraguay regularly, staying with Jung in Asunción, or with Krugg or at the Hotel Tirol in Encarnacion. He continued this pattern until some time in the 1970s, when he stopped coming to Paraguay. Von Eckstein said that up until a few years ago he knew of Mengele's whereabouts in Brazil. He claimed that he had deliberately refrained from finding out about Mengele more recently, feeling that it would do more harm than good in view of the constant drumbeat of publicity about him. Nonetheless, he expressed confidence that he could quickly track him down and find out if he was still alive.

Von Eckstein professed to have no prejudices against Jews, but did say that he opposed "Zionists." He spoke well of Mengele and claimed that at Auschwitz he had simply "followed orders." He claimed that Mengele had intervened to save many potential victims in the camp. He also spoke highly of Mengele's personality, saying that he was intelligent and well spoken. He said that at one period he used to see Mengele regularly, at least once a week.

Von Eckstein alleged that at the time the Federal Republic of Germany first asked Paraguay to extradite Mengele, its Ambassador in Asunción only went through the motions. He claimed that the Ambassador phoned him one day and invited him to his office. He told Von Eckstein that he was going to ask him about Mengele's whereabouts. He then looked at him carefully and said, "If I were to ask you that, you wouldn't know, would you?" Von Eckstein agreed.

Asked why he thought Von Eckstein seemed so willing to cooperate with him, Posner noted that he had written him a letter ahead of time, emphasizing his desire to write a completely accurate and "objective" (if such be possible in this case) book about Mengele. Von Eckstein seemed eager to talk to someone who would give him a hearing and report accurately what he said. Posner also speculated that perhaps the aging Von Eckstein (he is 79) wanted to tell his story before he dies.

In addition to his account of his conversations with Von Eckstein, Posner also recounted a discussion he said he had with Iser Harel, a former head of the Israeli intelligence service. According to Harel, the Israeli service had tracked Mengele down in the early 1960s to Krugg's farm near Encarnacion. The farm was heavily guarded and fortified and Harel said it would have required a commando operation to storm it and seize or kill Mengele. He said that after the uproar over the Eichmann kidnapping in 1960 the Israeli government was not willing to undertake such an operation. By the mid-1960s, said Harel, Israel had other more pressing concerns,

such as the rise of Palestinian terrorists. The Mengele matter was in effect shelved.

Posner said that with the Israelis out of the hunt, the only people who were actively looking for Mengele were certain Jewish organizations in the United States. One such organization, he said, was behind the recent press stories about an alleged attempt in 1977 to capture Mengele, which came to naught. In fact, said Posner, the Jewish group told him that the "attempt" was made in 1980. According to what they told Posner, they offered \$500,000 apiece to two Paraguayan military intelligence officers to seize and turn over Mengele to their "agent" in Foz do Iguazu.

The two Paraguayans allegedly cornered Mengele in an Asunción bank, which he supposedly visited regularly. Mengele, however, promptly offered the pair more money than the Jewish group, and was allowed to escape. Posner said that the Jewish group had gotten its leads on Mengele's whereabouts and on the Paraguayan "intelligence officers" from opposition personalities in Paraguay, including Dr. Joel Filartiga. He said that the members of the Jewish organization with whom he spoke appeared to believe this preposterous tale.

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Bios: Mengele, Von Eckstein, Rudel, Joel Filartiga

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